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Two killed in gas plant explosion

Men worked for local company

By [Gavin Lesnick](#) ([Contact](#))
Tuesday, April 29, 2008

An explosion Monday morning at a synthetic gas plant in West Terre Haute, Ind., killed two people employed by Evansville-based Sterling Boiler & Mechanical Inc.

Danny L. Turner of Marshall, Ill., and David E. Shoemaker of Rosedale, Ind., were working at the SG Solutions coal gasification plant in northern Vigo County shortly before 11 a.m. when pressurized gas burst through a covered opening in the pipe and ignited, said Sterling officials. No one else was injured.

Plant manager Richard Payonk said the synthetic gas was about 1,500 degrees Fahrenheit and was pressurized at 400 psi.

"That failure would be a relatively violent failure," he said.

Payonk said about 15 to 20 Sterling personnel work at the facility each day, and many are from the Terre Haute area.

Sterling controller Ken Wahl declined to comment Monday beyond a statement issued by the company.

"Sterling is assisting local authorities in every way possible in determining the cause of the explosion," the statement said, adding later, "Our hearts and prayers are with the families of these individuals."

Production stopped immediately after the explosion and remained halted Monday afternoon pending an investigation. Payonk said the state fire marshal was on the scene, and the company was working with authorities.

"We will determine the nature of the failure and what occurred," he said. "And we will put corrective actions in place based upon what we can find."

According to its Web site, Sterling Boiler was founded in 1982 as a company specializing in emergency repairs for utilities in Southern Indiana. It employs 1,000 workers across the country and has its corporate headquarters on Evansville's East Side, 1420 Kimber Lane.

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Post-Tribune

Building undergoing renovation no place for toddlers, court says

April 27, 2008

By [DIANE KRIEGER SPIVAK](#) Post-Tribune staff writer

LOWELL -- The attorney for Kidz World Day Care Center obtained a temporary injunction to stop the town from closing the doors on the tot spot Friday.

Town officials say the business, in a former furniture store at 410 Commercial Ave., which is undergoing remodeling, is no place for toddlers.

Kevin Werner, representing Thomas and Ilene Cresap, filed a complaint seeking a temporary restraining order and preliminary and permanent injunction to stop the town. A hearing set for Friday was continued a week.

Werner, who could not be reached for comment, said in an e-mail that the Cresaps, who opened their center a year ago, received approval from the Lowell Fire Department and state fire marshal, but that the town asked for a new inspection.

It was then that the Indiana Department of Homeland Security's Fire & Building Code Enforcement noted eight changes necessary to bring the building into compliance with state building and fire codes.

The state gave the center until June 1 to make the improvements. Lowell Director of Community Development Wilbur Cox said the town had already extended the deadline from April 1 to April 25.

"I hope the attorneys can work it out," Cox said.

John Erickson, senior public information officer for the Indiana Department of Homeland Security, said local rules supercede state code. "The town can handle it as they see fit," Erickson said.

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13 Investigates Burning Injustice: Part One

Updated: April 25, 2008 06:56 PM EDT



A midnight fire in April 2000 sent flames belching from Robin Montgomery's house.



An arson determination was made despite 10 negative lab tests analyzed by the state crime lab and a damaged lamp cord Gould admits she caught in a vacuum cleaner the day of the fire.

[Sandra Chapman](#)/13 Investigates

Indianapolis - More than 2,000 fires were intentionally set in Indiana last year. The state fire marshal's office says it cannot determine how many of them were ruled as arson.



Robin Montgomery

One Indiana man has a burning question: If your house caught fire, could you prove you didn't commit arson? Before you answer, you'll want to read about what 13 Investigates uncovered.

It's a case of burning injustice that is now sparking debate over how state fire investigators are doing their jobs.



Norma Montgomery

In a small river town known to take a gamble, there is a smoldering burn of injustice. A midnight fire in April 2000 sent flames belching from Robin Montgomery's house and claimed everything he owned - including his freedom.

"She [Jodi Gould] was screaming, hollering and pointing her finger saying I was the one that set the fire," said Rob Montgomery as he recounted the statements of his ex-girlfriend that night.

Montgomery is one of a growing number of arson suspects nationwide. All are facing time, even death sentences, for fires science says are not arson.



Ohio County Prosecutor Aaron Negangard

Ohio County Prosecutor Aaron Negangard said there was good reason to charge Montgomery.

"He was seen by an eyewitness leaving the house in somewhat of a rush," Negangard told 13 Investigates. "There's no question in my mind that Rob Montgomery is guilty, however, as it sits now he is not," said Negangard.

"He thought he was God, and he got away with it," Montgomery counters, criticizing the prosecutor.

The ordeal began in 2000. Montgomery was separated from his wife, and wanted his live-in girlfriend, Jodi Gould, to get out.

She left and went to a bar. Montgomery threw her clothes out on the back porch. Hours later the house erupted in flames.

Gould told police Montgomery called and threatened to burn his own house down. Montgomery denies the claim and no one else heard the allegation.

It was up to a state fire investigator to sort out the fire facts.

"At first I said everything is going to be all right. It's just, it's just a mistake, but as things progressed on it got worse," said Montgomery.

The investigator said two bedrooms were torched and that a burnt hole in the floor meant just one thing: accelerants. It's a theory technical fire experts now reject.

The state investigator also tossed out another potential culprit: a lamp.

Montgomery's wife Norma takes issue with the handling of the arson investigation. "He walked in there, shoveled a couple of things out the door, picked up some soil samples and wrote up a report saying it was arson," she said of State Fire Marshal Andy Long.

An arson determination was made despite 10 negative lab tests analyzed by the state crime lab and a damaged lamp cord Gould admits she caught in a vacuum cleaner the day of the fire.

"The lamp had signs of energized melting. And that means that the lamp cord burned from the inside out," explained Rob Montgomery.

An electrical engineer hired by the insurance company could not rule it out as a possible cause.

Montgomery's attorney assumed the prosecutor would call the electrical engineer and a second insurance investigator as witnesses. He was wrong.

13 Investigators asked Montgomery to recall the moment when the three guilty verdicts for arson, and fraud were read in court.

Through a well of tears, Montgomery said with a shaky voice, "I lost my family that day. I didn't do this. And they're putting me in jail for it. It's happening."

Robin Montgomery's sentence: 12 years with six suspended. The best he could hope for was three years served with good time.

His darkest moment, he said, was his first day in prison.

"The first day, going in, the things that they make you do. That was pretty hard on me. Things that I'm not going to talk about," he said shaking his head in continued disbelief.

Fourteen months passed, and then came the call the Montgomery's prayed for. In March 2004 the Indiana Court of Appeals reversed Robin Montgomery's conviction citing "ineffective assistance." The Appeals Court also admonished the Ohio County Prosecutor for questionable conduct, stating that he "gave rise to the ineffectiveness claim."

In its ruling the Appellate Court wrote:

"In this case, there was only circumstantial evidence of Montgomery's guilt. Indeed, what became

essentially a 'battle of experts,' corroborating expert testimony would have been particularly powerful, and in its absence, when available, substantially prejudicial."

Norma Montgomery summed it up in simple terms. "He did not get a fair trial," she said.

Prosecutor Negangard has his own explanation. "They just felt that there should have been other evidence presented to the jury to make a fair decision," he told 13 Investigates. "I never foresaw that me not calling these witnesses would cause such a hullabaloo," he added.

Robin Montgomery is free, but not in the clear. Negangard re-filed charges. Now eight years after the blaze, a new trial is set for May 13th.

13 Investigates asked Negangard why he is still pursuing charges.

"Well, because quite frankly the real victims of this were the men of the Rising Sun Volunteer Fire Department. They were called out to put out a fire that should have never been set," he said.

This time around, Indiana's fire investigation standards will face scrutiny too.

Montgomery now has a critically acclaimed scientist, Dr. Gerald Hurst, backing him up. Hurst, a chemist, investigates arson cases nationwide.

"You don't have any evidence of arson," warned Hurst. "What you've got is this hocus pocus," he said, referring to the case against Rob Montgomery.

Coming up on Friday, a former chief with the State Fire Marshal's office responds. 13 Investigates shows why other fire industry experts call the lack of investigation standards: malpractice. Plus the death row cases of men that science says were wrongly accused. Watch Part Two of Burning Injustice on Eyewitness News at 5:30.

[Read more about Montgomery's case](#)

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Burning Injustice Part Two Expert: Arson teams using outdated techniques

Posted: April 25, 2008 03:59 PM EDT

Updated: April 25, 2008 04:40 PM EDT



Ernest Willis walked free after waiting 17 years to die.

[Sandra Chapman](#)/13 Investigates

Indianapolis - They are supposed to be Indiana's elite in fire investigation. But a nationally renown scientist says state arson teams here and across the country are using outdated, unproven techniques. Some experts say it's putting innocent suspects behind bars and even to death.

Cameron Todd Willingham and Ernest Willis both sat on death row convicted of setting separate deadly fires. Their court cases were largely based on untested, outdated techniques.



Dan Churchward, electrical engineer and fire consultant

Willingham was executed in Texas in 2004. Willis walked free and clear after spending 17 years waiting to die.

Upon his release, a tearful Willis told reporters his wife "helped me get through the last six years."

From Texas to Indiana, courts are challenging burning cases of legal disaster.

Rob Montgomery of Rising Sun has yet to get over his arson conviction.



Former Indiana Chief Investigator
Bob Dean

"No. I've learned to live with it," he told 13 Investigates.

Montgomery served 14 months in prison. He was accused and convicted of burning down his own house. Now, eight years later, he faces a retrial on the same charges.

His first case, full of scientific holes, was reversed by the Indiana Court of Appeals.

"He said he found an accelerant in the house," Montgomery said of the Indiana State Fire Marshal who handled his case. "There's no evidence of that whatsoever," he said with disgust.



State Fire Investigator Andy Long said a burned hole in the floor and a warning from his hydrocarbon detector was proof enough. For 30 years that was the accepted, untested, method. Montgomery was convicted despite ten negative lab results for accelerants from the state crime lab. The rationale: fire burns up the evidence.

"The problem with it is, you can take tennis shoes and burn them up and get the hydrocarbon readings that are consistent with gasoline,

charcoal and lighter fluid," said Dan Churchward of Fort Wayne.

Churchward is a certified electrical engineer and fire consultant. In 2001, he chaired a national technical committee to review fire investigation standards. It was a first for the industry.

What the committee found sparked a firestorm.

"We've got a body of knowledge out there that people are relying on that's incorrect," he confirmed. "We started realizing they're not only woefully inadequate, they were woefully wrong."

"We killed an innocent man," Churchward said, referring to Todd Willingham and the lack of scientific fire standards. "How many others have we killed?" he questioned. "It's horrible. If we were doctors treating patients and we tolerated this kind of behavior, we would be vilified."

Instead, Churchward and his committee took intense heat. Investigators didn't like the new National Fire Protection standards called NFPA 921.

Some Indiana investigators still don't embrace it. They don't have to.

Former Indiana Chief Investigator Bob Dean doesn't dispute the resistance across Indiana.

"When a national organization says you have to do this, you have to do that, of course they're going to say 'no, we don't,'" said Dean. But he also agrees it's a problem to have inconsistent fire investigation standards.

"Yes, it is a very big disservice," he told 13 Investigates.

It's an issue in Rob Montgomery's case.

According to court records, State Investigator Andy Long failed to test a lamp near the point of origin, and concluded that two bedrooms were torched. But Long dismissed the possibility that falling ceiling embers set one bed on fire.

Long is now retired. Bob Dean is his former chief.

"921 is a good guideline to follow for fire investigators," said Dean, but added, "Nobody can enforce it so how can I say you have to follow this guideline when nobody can enforce that guideline?"

Even Montgomery's own original defense expert was found lacking.

Thomas Hulse, the chief fire engineer at IUPUI has written articles criticizing NFPA 921. Months ago, [13 Investigates revealed](#) he has degrees from two reported diploma mills.

13 Investigates went to his Indianapolis office to talk with him about his role in Montgomery's first trial.

"I'm not going to talk about the case," said Hulse.

"I trusted him, I trusted him with my life," Montgomery said in disbelief. He was not aware that Hulse had degrees from two reported diploma mills.

Now facing a second trial, Montgomery wants his name cleared and all arson investigators held to the fire on science.

The Montgomerys have a new attorney and have turned to an arson mastermind in Austin, Texas for help. They didn't get someone who sets fires, but a Cambridge trained chemist who is taking on the life and death fight for those convicted of arson on what experts call "junk science."

That chemist is Dr. Gerald Hurst.

"This is a sorry, sorry situation. There's no way you could get justice out of this," Hurst said from his office in the basement of his Austin home.

Dr. Hurst has won plenty of court fights. In a room off his office, boxes of documents from arson cases all across the country are stacked up.

Hurst was the expert who took on the death row cases that prompted new standards. Losing Todd Willingham to execution set his mission afire.

"I began raising hell about it," he said.

For Hurst it's simple: without undisputable evidence, arson convictions must be based on science, not a suspect's likeability, legal history or lack of money.

13 Investigates asked Dr. Hurst what gives him the right to say fire investigators in Indiana and across the country are not doing it right.

"Nobody has ever come to me with something I've reported, taken one of my 25 to 30 page reports and said you got this wrong," he explained.

Dan Churchward is well aware of Dr. Hurst's work. Churchward also was part of an independent team of experts asked to review the Willingham and Willis cases. That team came to the same conclusion as Hurst and determined the fires were not arson.

"It makes me feel very bad that we as a fire investigation community tolerate such standards," added Churchward.

In Montgomery's case, Hurst says the fire broke out on a chest of drawers. That's where the lamp sat. He says the prosecutor didn't want the insurance company investigators to testify because one could not rule out the lamp and the other rejected the state's claim that two bedrooms were torched.

"I mean, that is dynamite. That blows away the multiple origin case," said Hurst. He says multiple fire origins are generally linked to arson determinations.

"Worse than that, he gave the insurance company precedence over the state to investigate a supposed crime. This is unbelievable," added Hurst.

But the Ohio County prosecutor isn't backing down.

"Mr. Hurst's evidence was not compelling to me that Mr. Montgomery was innocent," said Prosecutor Aaron Negangard, who interviewed Dr. Hurst for the upcoming trial. Negangard says it will be up to a jury to determine which expert to believe.

"I believe in the criminal justice system. If they decide he's not guilty I will be satisfied with that result," said Negangard.

Former State Chief Investigator Bob Dean says the court system provides checks and balances for the work of fire investigators.

"If the defense does their job and we're wrong, he's going to prove it wrong," he insists.

But that's a far cry from the standards the Montgomerys want for arson suspects. Norma Montgomery vows to fight until their voices are heard.

"Someday we will win and this will be made into a law that they have to go by the science," she said.

The State Fire Marshal's office has ten fire districts across Indiana with an investigator assigned to each. Investigators must complete the Indiana Law Enforcement Academy and have five years of fire investigation experience.

In 2003, fire investigators were re-certified by the National Fire Academy through FEMA.

The State Fire Marshal's office still regards the new recommended standards from the NFPA 921 (National Fire Protection Association 921) simply as guidelines. With no change in state law, field supervisors will continue reviewing arson cases with no mandated standards.

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THE NEWS-DISPATCH



4/26/2008 11:00:00 AM

Fire Destroys Grand Beach Home

Jason Miller
The News-Dispatch

GRAND BEACH, Mich. - One lakeside house was destroyed and another damaged when a wind-swept fire spread across several acres of brush and dune in Grand Beach on Thursday afternoon.

Two inspectors from the Michigan State Fire Marshal's office were flying above the area in a Michigan State Police helicopter Friday morning assessing the land damage and hoping to find a hint to what started the massive fire, which also lapped at the sides of at least three other homes without doing any damage.

"The green grass saved those houses," Grand Beach Police Officer George Keeler said. "That fire hit the green grass and stopped. Where it took hold was in all that dune grass. When the fire hit that it just took off."

Winds were gusting up to 40 miles per hour Thursday when Grand Beach police received a call from a neighbor around 10:40 a.m. EDT saying the side of a hill was on fire.

When firefighters from New Buffalo arrived, the fire jumped across Perkins Boulevard in the tree-lined neighborhood and began spreading quickly up a steep hill toward a home at 50005 Highpoint Drive that neighbors say was under construction.

The fire spread along the backside of the hill and carved a swath nearly a quarter mile wide, burning the garage of a home at 49019 E. McKean that firefighters said was rebuilt two years ago after it previously burned. The fire also scorched tree lines just feet from the backs and side of three homes, which were barely touched.

"The first tanker got up there and then the fire just jumped the road," Brent Rainwater, a New Buffalo City firefighter, said at the scene. "Than all of a sudden the whole hillside was burning."

Rainwater, who was back Friday inspecting the damage, said he immediately called other fire departments when the fire jumped the road. Departments from New Buffalo, New Buffalo Township, Chikaming Town-ship and Bridgman in Michigan and from Michi-ana Shores, Long Beach and Springfield Township in Indiana responded.

New Buffalo Fire Chief Bill Taylor credited the firefighters from those seven departments for staving off more damage.

"Every department worked real hard out here," Taylor said. "They all finished up around 8:30 Michigan time. This was a long day."

Keener said the department couldn't comment on possible causes, pointing to the helicopter hovering above his head.

"That's what they're doing here," he said.

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Governor's appeal granted by FEMA

| Monday, April 28, 2008 |

The Federal Emergency Management Agency approved Gov. Mitch Daniels' request for federal assistance to governments in northern Indiana devastated by flooding earlier this year, the state announced Monday.

Counties included are Benton, Carroll, Cass, DeKalb, Elkhart, Jasper, Kosciusko, Marshall, Newton, Noble, Pulaski, Starke and White.

On March 20, FEMA denied a request to assist state, county and local governments to repair damage and reimburse emergency costs. The governor appealed the original decision, saying that damage was much more severe than originally recognized. Additional damage was discovered and verified in several counties after flood water receded.

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Counties included are Benton, Carroll, Cass, DeKalb, Elkhart, Jasper, Kosciusko, Marshall, Newton, Noble, Pulaski, Starke and White.

On March 20, FEMA denied a request to assist state, county and local governments to repair damage and reimburse emergency costs. The governor appealed the original decision, saying that damage was much more severe than originally recognized. Additional damage was discovered and verified in several counties after flood water receded.

FEMA's public assistance program provides supplemental federal disaster grant assistance for debris removal, emergency protective measures, and the repair, replacement, or restoration of disaster-damaged, publicly owned facilities and the facilities of certain private non-profit organizations. The program also encourages protection of these damaged facilities from future events by providing assistance for hazard mitigation measures during the recovery process.

Source: Indiana Department of Homeland Security

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FEMA Reverses Decision on Flood Assistance in Northern Ind.

By the Associated Press

4/28/2008

Thirteen northern Indiana counties that sustained damage to city- or county-owned buildings and other property because of flooding in January and February became eligible for federal assistance on Monday after FEMA reversed a previous decision.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency announced its decision after Gov. Mitch Daniels last week appealed the agency's initial ruling. The flooding that began Jan. 7 caused more than \$33 million damage to privately owned and public property, state officials said.

FEMA changed its ruling after the state provided additional information showing that the affected county governments had sustained at least \$7.5 million in damages, said John Erickson, an Indiana Department of Homeland Security spokesman. More damages were discovered after FEMA's initial decision on March 20.

FEMA will reimburse 75 percent of qualified damages, Erickson said. The amount of money each city or county will receive will depend on complex formulas FEMA use, he said.

The counties affected are Benton, Carroll, Cass, DeKalb, Elkhart, Jasper, Kosciusko, Marshall, Newton, Noble, Pulaski, Starke and White. The floods damaged hundreds of homes and displaced thousands of residents.

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April 28, 2008

FEMA reverses course, flood relief coming

STAFF REPORTS

County governments stuck with bills for cleanup after the January and February floods will qualify for federal help.

The Indiana Department of Homeland Security reported this morning that the Federal Emergency Management Agency has approved Gov. Mitch Daniels' request for federal assistance to governments in northern Indiana.

The counties include several in the Lafayette area, including Benton, Carroll, Newton, Pulaski and White.

In March, FEMA denied a request to assist state, county and local governments to repair damage and reimburse emergency costs.

Daniels appealed the original decision, saying the damage should have qualified for help. FEMA sent crews to re-inspect the damage in several counties earlier this month.

For more on this story, read Tuesday's J&C.

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April 29, 2008

FEMA changes ruling, will offer flood aid

By SOPHIA VORAVONG
svoravong@journalandcourier.com

Gordon Cochran, director of White County's emergency management agency, expects that it will be another two to three years before northern Indiana fully recovers from damage caused by flooding in January and February.

But federal funding being granted to government agencies in 13 northern Indiana counties should help speed repairs to roads, bridges and ditches.

"This is going to help us," Cochran said. "Now, we won't have to take away money that was supposed to be just for county roads. We have a happy medium now."

The Indiana Department of Homeland Security announced Monday that the Federal Emergency Management Agency approved a request by Gov. Mitch Daniels for federal assistance.

County officials had been told in March that they did not meet the threshold for reimbursement.

Daniels' appeal pointed out that additional damage was discovered and verified in several counties after flood waters receded. Counties in the Lafayette area being reimbursed include Benton, Carroll, Jasper, Newton and White.

FEMA changed its ruling after the state provided additional information showing that the affected county governments had sustained at least \$7.5 million in damages, said John Erickson, an Indiana Department of Homeland Security spokesman.

FEMA will reimburse 75 percent of qualified damages, Erickson said.

The news came as a relief to Ron Francis, Carroll County highway supervisor.

His department incurred more than \$130,000 helping to clean up flood damage.

One thing he hopes federal funding will help pay for is a pipe -- about 35 feet deep in a ravine -- that washed out during the flooding. The county does not have equipment to reach it.

"I'm just really happy that it's working out for us," Francis said. "As small as our county is population-wise, we don't get a lot of funding anywhere else."

Contributing: The Associated Press

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FEMA reverses decision on flood assistance in northern Ind.

Associated Press - April 28, 2008 7:14 PM ET

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) - Government buildings and other property damaged by flooding in 13 northern Indiana counties this winter will get federal help after all.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency reversed an earlier decision and will pay 75% of the damages that qualify for assistance.

The state says the flooding that began January 7th caused more than \$33 million damage overall to privately owned and public property. FEMA changed its ruling after an appeal by Governor Daniels.

The state also provided more information, showing the affected county governments had sustained at least \$7.5 million. John Erickson, an Indiana Department of Homeland Security spokesman, says the actual amount reimbursed will depend on complex formulas used by FEMA.

The affected counties are Benton, Carroll, Cass, DeKalb, Elkhart, Jasper, Kosciusko, Marshall, Newton, Noble, Pulaski, Starke and White.

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Herald Journal

FEMA funding approved

Kevin Howell

Reporter

Thirteen northern Indiana counties will receive funding after all for expenses incurred during flooding earlier this year according to an announcement made Monday through Indiana Department of Homeland Security.

On March 20, FEMA denied a request to assist state, county and local governments for damage repairs and to reimburse emergency costs.

Governor Mitch Daniels appealed the decision, saying damage was much more severe than originally recognized. Additional damage was discovered and verified in several counties after flood water receded.

Now White County, along with Carroll, Benton, Cass, DeKalb, Elkhart, Jasper, Kosciusko, Marshall, Newton, Noble, Pulaski, and Starke counties will receive requested aid, and White County Commissioner Steve Burton couldn't be happier.

"We had requested more than \$1.5 million for bridge repair, road repair, and a lot of drainage ditch repair, said Burton on hearing the news.

"Also up in Buffalo, the commissioners put dumpsters out for flood related materials - not for normal garbage - and they were there for over three months."

Due to extremely harsh weather following the floods, many residents couldn't clean up their homes and properties right away, so dumpsters were left in place until they could.

Not only in Buffalo, dumpsters were also placed at Monticello's Bluewater Beach and other areas stricken by high water.

Add that expense to overtime for county and city emergency workers during evacuations, cleaning out washed-in drainage ditches, and other damage and the dollar amounts kept adding up.

"We had a huge bill on drainage ditches, for example about \$.5 million at Big Monon. Floodwaters ate the bank out and we had to clean that back out," Burton said.

As for the dumpsters, unlike Carroll County which was able to use county highway trucks to pick up flood debris and building materials from stricken homes, White County's were busy moving piles of corn stalks washed out of farm fields and cleaning ditches.

So White County placed dumpsters out in place of trash pick up.

Burton said the amount denied initially by FEMA was not just an arbitrary number either.

"Gordy (White County EMA Director Gordon Cochran) worked hard to tabulate those numbers - it wasn't just something we pulled out of the air and threw right at them," Burton said.

Burton said when the funds are received, Monticello and other municipalities will receive their share for reimbursement.

"If we get \$1.5 million, or whatever the figure is, you'll see a lot of smiles in White County," said Burton.

Second district Congressman Joe Donnelly, who represents the northeast corner of White County which includes Buffalo, said in a statement Monday that he was also pleased with FEMA's change of mind.

"I am very pleased to hear that FEMA has granted Public Assistance to the northern Indiana counties that are recovering from January's flood," said Donnelly. "These counties deserve the financial assistance they will receive from FEMA to help offset the costs of the flood damage."

Donnelly authored a letter to FEMA, signed by every member of the Indiana Congressional delegation, supporting Indiana's request for public assistance.

FEMA's public assistance program provides supplemental federal disaster grant assistance for debris removal, emergency protective measures, and the repair, replacement, or restoration of disaster-damaged, publicly owned facilities and the facilities of certain private non-profit organizations.

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Governor's appeal granted by FEMA; Northern Indiana governments to receive aid

Written by Press Release, on 04-28-2008 14:38

Indianapolis (April 28, 2008) – The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has approved Governor Mitch Daniels' request for federal assistance to governments in northern Indiana devastated by flooding earlier this year.

Counties included are Benton, Carroll, Cass, DeKalb, Elkhart, Jasper, Kosciusko, Marshall, Newton, Noble, Pulaski, Starke and White.

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FEMA's public assistance program provides supplemental federal disaster grant assistance for debris removal, emergency protective measures, and the repair, replacement, or restoration of disaster-damaged, publicly owned facilities and the facilities of certain private non-profit organizations. The program also encourages protection of these damaged facilities from future events by providing assistance for hazard mitigation measures during the recovery process.

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FEMA reverses decision on flood assistance in northern Indiana

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — The federal government has reversed its decision and agreed to grant assistance to 13 northern [Indiana](#) counties damaged this winter by flooding.

The [Federal Emergency Management Agency](#) announced its decision today after Gov. Mitch Daniels last week appealed the agency's initial ruling.

The money is for governments in the 13 counties. [President Bush](#) previously approved federal disaster aid for residents in the area.

The counties affected are Benton, Carroll, Cass, DeKalb, Elkhart, Jasper, Kosciusko, Marshall, Newton, Noble, Pulaski, Starke and White.

State officials say the flooding that began Jan. 7 caused more than \$33 million damage.

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High water causing problems in Knox County

Posted: April 29, 2008 06:07 AM EDT

KNOX COUNTY, Ind. (WTHI) - "There was a fence, and a tree row, this was all wooded," says Cindy Westfall as she takes News 10 on a tour of her flooded home.

Five years ago, Cindy and Bob Westfall bought their home near Vincennes, Indiana.

"We were told that there were some water problems, and that the water level was high," explains Cindy.

The house doesn't sit on a flood plain, so Cindy never imagined the water problems could turn her lawn into a lake.

"When we got the rain that was really bad after Easter, then it just kept coming up further, and further," she says.

One month later, the water still hasn't gone down. Cindy and her husband can't even get out of their driveway. Instead, they go through a neighbor's property to get to and from work.

"It's been a lifesaver, cause otherwise, we couldn't get out," Cindy says.

Even the UPS truck hesitates before crossing the high water. The Knox County Commissioners provided the Westfalls with sandbags. Cindy says they told her there was not enough money in the budget to do more.

"He said, to get a regulated ditch is expensive, and we don't have the funds, and we'd have to get an attorney and right now, we don't have that kind of money to do something like that," Cindy tells News 10.

In the meantime, they live around their water problem, and they've spent a lot of their own money trying to fix it.

They dug the nearby pond deeper to try to absorb the water; they've laid more gravel, but the water still stands.

Inside, standing water makes their basement unliveable. The furniture is up on blocks of wood to avoid water damage. On the walls, you can see visible mold.

"We've even got toadstools growing!" Cindy exclaims.

Everytime it rains, Cindy worries that more water will cause them more trouble.

"We just don't know where to turn," she says.

The Department of Homeland Security says the areas affected by the March flooding did not experience the damage needed to qualify for individual assistance through the FEMA Disaster Assistance Program.

News 10 attempted to contact the Knox County Commissioners, but so far our calls have not been returned.

By: Liz Nichols

WTHI-TV

[*Return to Flooding*](#)



BSU Students Develop State's Emergency Communications Protocol

By Don Riley

4/28/2008

The Indiana Department of Homeland Security has a new crisis communications protocol developed by students at Ball State University.

Joe Wainscott, Executive Director of the Indiana Department of Homeland Security, says the protocol coordinates procedures for getting the word out during emergencies.

The students passed the Federal Emergency Management Agency course on public information systems before taking on the project.

Ball State University President Jo Ann Gora says it's a good example of students learning by taking a real world problem and finding a practical solution for it.

Wainscott says the department will use the protocol for training public information personnel throughout the state.

The project is part of a \$2.5 million grant Ball State received from the Department of Homeland Security to develop emergency public communications training.

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